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Why Should We Fortify the Panama Canal?

BY

FRANK W. MONDELL
MEMBER OF CONGRESS FROM WYOMING

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MEMBER OF CONGRESS FROM WYOMING.

THE veteran statesman, Eugene Hale, said, on the floor of the Senate, that this nation was Army and Navy mad. Congress lent color to the indictment when, in the closing days of the last Congress, it made a first appropriation of $3,000,000 to begin the fortification of the Panama Canal. Careful estimates of the final cost of the initial work place it at not less than $50,000,000. In this first appropriation Congress apparently indorsed the entire plan. A second appropriation will shortly be called for and it will be voted, unless the people make a determined protest and restrain their representatives from carrying out this utterly unprofitable and distinctly dangerous program. If the people understood they would protest.

For years we have been emptying the Treasury into the War and Navy Departments with reckless prodigality, supporting the most expensive military system ever known on earth, while this new proposition to enlarge its scope is the more astonishing because our national aspirations, theories and convictions are all opposed to it. The first appropriation was carried against the earnest protests of many able and patriotic members of Congress. It was carried by a cry for "armed neutrality" and that slogan of a departed age of feudal despotism—"In time of peace prepare for war." It was a shock to many, even of those who are under the influence of the mania of militarism, when it was announced that the bill had passed; for there were few beyond the most devoted camp-followers who really believed that Congress would ever seriously consider the fortification of the canal.

Today a strong movement is going on in Congress to prevent further appropriations along this line, but it needs the help of public opinion. It will receive it if the people will only look seriously into the subject instead of thoughtlessly following the predilections of boyhood to run after soldiers; if they would realize that while this initial expenditure of a probable fifty million dollars has not, itself, the shadow of a chance of being of practical benefit, it entails other immense expenditures which, at once become automatically obligatory, and that, whatever may be promised to the contrary, in the natural course of things it is but the modest forerunner of vaster demands which must of necessity be granted by Congress if we adopt the policy of depending upon fortifications for the protection of the canal.

Even if the whole question was closed with the appropriation of fifty millions for fortification, there would be added to the cost of the canal the annual interest, $1,500,000; the annual depreciation, placed at $5,000,000; the annual cost of maintaining the force behind the guns—which a year ago was placed by General Wood at 7,000 men and a minimum cost of $8,400,000, but which he has since raised to 12,000 men, with proportionate increase in cost—adding at least $17,000,000 annually to the already serious burden which we are handing down to posterity on account of the canal—$11,225,000, interest on the authorized bond issue, and $7,000,000 estimated for the ordinary maintenance of the canal, not allowing for any serious accidents. Thus, at a low estimate, the United States Treasury must stand pledged for $35,000,000 annually, while the bravest hopes for revenue accruing to the Government thru the use of the canal do not venture materially above $4,000,000 a year. Without further incidents and no accidents, the Panama Canal means a certain loss to the people of the United States of at least $31,000,000 a year.

World peace foundation

But there will be accidents and there *are* further incidents. With army appropriations alone, if progress is made in the art of war as during the last ten years, another decade of perfect peace will find all that we do today obsolete and pitiably inadequate—helplessly old-fashioned as the present harbor defenses of our great cities and useless as the Dewey dry-dock at the bottom of Subig Bay. To keep pace with progress in even a plausible pretense at protecting the canal against the world would mean a literal mortgage of the United States; while the canal would still remain as vulnerable as the Philippines, really protected just as they are, by the potent fact that while every one wants the use of them no one hankers after the expensive ownership.

But army appropriations will not stand alone. Already the Navy Department wants a war harbor at either end of the canal as indispensable to its usefulness. Preparing and protecting such harbors cannot be accomplished for $50,000,000. It is also provided that there shall be naval stations and dry docks, as a matter of necessity, at a cost of from $50,000,000 to $100,000,000 more, if properly and adequately equipped, in a way to be of real war value.

The saddest feature of all this is the absolute inertia of the public. I believe that it is as often indifference as it is military madness—indifference due to our system of indirect taxation. We know that the United States is rich and we like to parade the fact before other nations, just as some people like to parade their individual wealth before their neighbors. In the popular hysteria of the world today the army and navy appeal to us as the ideal thing to decorate for this purpose. No one has the remotest expectation of ever applying any of these decorations to real war. We simply enjoy the splurge because other nations—with some substantial excuse for it—appear to us to be splurging. We complimented ourselves immensely on sending a fleet of big battleships round the world—tho to keep it going we had to hire of other nations a larger fleet of supply ships and in the end only betrayed the helplessness of our own navy for anything like real war. We do it all without realizing the silly side—or the serious side that these extravagant policies exhaust this nation's wealth to a far greater extent than army and navy maintenance exhausts the wealth of other nations. We thoughtlessly dissipate our most precious economic resources, deprive ourselves of the productive energy of thousands of hands and brains, and incidentally materially increase our cost of living.

From the President down we hear brave talk of Government economy. For sweet economy's sake Congress peremptorily refuses appropriations for much needed home development which would incalculably increase the value and wealth of our country; yet we annually pass the billion dollar mark, lavishing money for the development of our army and navy—appropriations which are unproductive, unremunerative, largely exhausted and gone with the going of each fiscal year.

For the past ten years we have expended 73 per cent. of our entire Federal income on war—past and future. In preparing for dream-wars we have spent $2,200,000,000 in the past ten years—a sum only $500,000,000 less than our entire national debt at the *close* of the Civil War. The entire loss by fire, in the whole of North America, in the last *eighty-five years,* amounts to about one-quarter of what we have spent in the last *ten years* to maintain our military policy. Yet today we are told by our great militarists that we are deplorably weak. Official reports (published and suppressed) declare that almost any nation on earth could invade and desolate our land. Thru a decade of profound peace, with constantly increasing certainty of perpetual peace, we have refused much needed expenditures for the development of our country and seen the cost of living constantly increase, that we might devote more than $200,000,000 a year to the demands of our fighting men—to insure our country against being swept from the map by some vague, impossible enemy—only to learn from them, today, that we are less adequately prepared for war than at any time in our history. As a simple business proposition, after such experience we should hesitate when the

same agents urge this new policy, costing hundreds of millions more to protect the Panama Canal.

Incidentally we must remember that the canal can be absolutely protected by neutralization treaties; that it is as safe today, and always will be, as the Suez Canal, which has existed in the very hotbed of war, without a single fort or battleship to defend it, and with never one single attempt to injure it. We must admit that it is a great waste of money to fortify the canal, while as a theory it is the most dangerous which the nation could follow, and as a policy it is morally wrong. Even if it cost us absolutely nothing, there is every reason why we should not fortify the canal, and there is not one honorable or practical reason why we should. It is diametrically contrary to the public opinion we have officially exprest thru almost a century while a canal connecting the two oceans has been a topic of world-wide discussion. We have radically opposed any possibility that such a waterway should ever become an asset of war.

Let us glance at our participation in the pre-natal history of the canal. In 1826, Henry Clay, Secretary of State under John Quincy Adams, wrote officially:

"If this work should ever be executed, so as to admit the passage of sea vessels from ocean to ocean, the benefits of it ought not to be exclusively appropriated to any one nation, but should be extended to all parts of the globe alike."

A few years later, the United States Senate adopted a resolution requesting the President to

"open negotiations with other governments for the purpose of securing forever, by treaty stipulations, the free and equal rights of all nations for navigating any canal constructed across the Isthmus of Panama, upon the payment of reasonable tolls."

In 1839, the House of Representatives unanimously adopted a resolution to investigate the practicability of a canal and "of securing forever, by suitable treaty stipulations, the free and equal right of navigating such a canal to all nations."

In 1847, President Polk, sending the Senate the treaty with New Granada, said:

"The ultimate object is to secure to all nations the free and equal right of passage over the isthmus. There does not appear to be any other effectual means of securing to all nations the advantages of this important passage but by the guarantee of the great commercial powers that the isthmus shall be neutral territory. The interests of the world at stake are so important that the security of this passage between the two oceans cannot be suffered to depend upon the wars and revolutions which may arise among different nations."

In 1858, Mr. Cass, Secretary of State, put the proposition even more strongly, and in 1881, Mr. Blaine, while Secretary of State, wrote, officially, to Minister Lowell, in London:

"The United States recognizes the property guaranty of neutrality as essential to the construction and successful operation of any highway across the Isthmus of Panama"

In 1885 President Cleveland said:

"Whatever highway may be constructed across the barrier dividing the two great maritime areas of the world, must be for the world's benefit, a trust for mankind, *to be removed from the chance of domination by any single power, nor become a point of invitation for hostilities, or a prize for warlike ambition.*"

All this was our opinion before we expected to become proprietors, but President Roosevelt said, in his special message to Congress: "The principle enunciated by Secretary Cass was sound then and it is sound now"—a sentiment to which many still say "Amen."

The great Powers controlling the Suez Canal were the strongest on the earth at the time, but, realizing the difficulties and dangers of a policy of defense, they neutralized the canal by international treaties, declaring it "forever free and open to all nations, in time of war as in time of peace, to every vessel of commerce or of war, without distinction of flag." And tho wars have been waged all about it no hand was ever raised to injure it—or ever will be—because it is a neutralized highway of the world. If forts had been established there would have been "a point of invitation for hostilities," and if they had been captured, the canal would rightly have been considered a perquisite of war. It will be precisely the same with the Panama Canal.

But to go on a little farther in the history of our canal. In 1901, we consummated a treaty with Great Britain, in which the theories and principles of neutralization were taken, almost word for word, from the Convention of Constantinople, concerning the Suez Canal, and

mutually accepted as applying to the Panama Canal. That treaty—our treaty with Great Britain—says:

"The canal shall never be blockaded nor shall any right of war be exercised or any act of hostility committed within it. . . . The plant, establishment, buildings, and all work necessary to the construction, and maintenance and operation of the canal shall be deemed a part thereof for the purposes of this treaty, and in time of war, as in time of peace, shall enjoy complete immunity from attack or injury by belligerents and from acts calculated to impair their usefulness as parts of the canal."

If our fighting departments deem these forts and naval stations as included in this treaty they are demanding these colossal expenditures simply for amusement—to play with painted ships upon a painted ocean. If not, then they know that by these expenditures they cause us to vitiate all of the benefits of neutralization, inviting assaults upon the canal and making it "a prize for warlike ambition." In other words, they cause us to discard the perfect and perpetual protection of neutralization, which would cost us nothing, for the doubtful defense afforded by our own army and navy, at an initial outlay of hundreds of millions of dollars, and an annual cost of many millions more: with the added certainty that if there should ever be a war their presence there will throw the canal into otherwise impossible danger.

Obviously, this military outlay will not be profitable in time of peace. Still less is it expedient if there is any possibility of war. But our Government went yet farther in promising neutrality. In 1903 we entered into treaty with Panama for the right to construct and maintain a canal. In this treaty we promised that "the canal, when constructed, *and the entrances* thereto, shall be neutral in perpetuity, and shall be open in conformity with all the stipulations of the treaty" with Great Britain.

This suggests an important fact which we must not overlook, and that is that we do not own, in sovereign right, one single foot of land in Panama. We only acquired the right to construct and maintain a canal across the Isthmus, for the benefit of the commerce of the world; leaving no possible excuse which we can give for those fortifications which is not in violent antagonism to all of our promises and pledges. Why, indeed, should we set this gift to the commerce of the world in a frame of forts and battleships? There is only one possible excuse, and that redounds to our disgrace and shame.

It is true, as the advocates claimed, that nothing in the treaties positively prohibits the fortifications—except that in a general way we overstep the rights granted us by Panama; but it is obvious that the very idea of fortification was so foreign and antagonistic to every theory of neutralization, and so abhorrent to every principle ever advanced by the United States, that it would have been deemed absurd, at the time when the treaties were signed, to deny or abrogate the right. So that our only excuse for erecting the fortifications, today, is a hideous declaration to the nations of the earth that we do not propose to trust their promises or to keep our own; that they will use the canal only while it is for our interest to allow it. This is not overdrawn. Read the statements made by Lieutenant-General Wood, the Chief of Staff, to the Committee on Appropriations in the House:

The Chairman asked: "Is it not true, in the last analysis, that the purpose, in fortifying the canal, is to insure to the United States its use as a military asset, in case of war?"

General Wood: "That is undoubtedly the most important of all purposes in fortifying the canal."

Another Member: "To secure to the United States the exclusive control of the canal in time of hostilities?"

General Wood: "That is the principal purpose of fortifying the canal, . . . to control it, in time of war, as our safety and interests demands."

This, then, is why we fortify the Panama Canal. We, the great advocate of peace and honor among nations, who began the canal for glory and the unhampered commerce of the world, have decided to finish it as an asset of war for ourselves, only to be used by others in accordance with our interests. It is doubtless true, as stated in debate, on the floor of the House, that England had been approached and had signified that she found nothing in her treaty to prevent our erecting fortifications if we chose. But England's real comment upon our changed attitude came a little later, when she began the expenditure of a large sum, mak-

ing another Gibraltar of her already formidable naval station at Jamaica, almost opposite the entrance to the canal. And how the other nations of the world must laugh at us—laugh in their sleeves at us—that we neglect Honolulu, Samoa and other really strategic points, which at comparatively small cost (like Jamaica) might be made strongholds of infinite importance in defense, while we expend hundreds of millions of dollars in efforts to defend the colossal canal, which, if it is not already invulnerably immune, can be made so thru neutralization; and which, no matter how well we may defend it, can be utterly wrecked at any moment by a bomb dropped from an airship, or a "Merrimac," blown up by some patriotic "Hobson," in one of the locks. And how they must enjoy the quiet comment of the work going on at Jamaica.

There is not a nation on the earth which would dare to disregard its obligations to the commerce of the world by doing any injury to the great international waterway. Even as a war asset it is of far greater value to us, left unguarded, except by neutralization, than if fortified beyond any possibility in our power; while, on the other hand, if we desire to challenge the world to injure or capture the canal, there is no better way of extending the invitation—and of securing the result—than by taking upon ourselves, as we are doing, the barbaric responsibility of preserving it by force of arms. Suppose a time of war and that we reserved the canal for our own use, giving us a great advantage over the enemy. What is surer than that the enemy would wreck it, as our important asset. Suppose the same war with the canal unfortified and strictly neutral. What is surer than that any enemy would scrupulously refrain from injuring it? It would not be an act of hostility against the United States, but against the entire commercial world, which would be universally resented. France and England realized this from the outset, concerning the Suez Canal.

The proper policing of the canal, at all times, is our duty. It is easily, simply and effectively accomplished. We shall do it anyway, wholly irrespective of the forts. We shall do it at no great expense, as a part of the cost of maintenance. In policing the entrances we can even utilize, at no cost whatever, a few of our already equipped battleships, giving them, at last, a little real responsibility. But the fortifications and war harbors are solely and absolutely for nothing in the world but war! We have even officially acknowledged it.

Let us look into this point a little farther; for here comes in the silly side. War presupposes an enemy. Puzzle! Find the enemy. The menace of a hostile fleet at Panama is most remote. It requires no prophet to predict that not in this twentieth century shall we become entangled with any European Power capable of sending such a fleet across the Atlantic. Nor does it take the wisdom of a sage to realize that England, France and Germany will see to it that the canal is handled as carefully as we could wish. For they are the ones who will derive the benefits—with their vast commercial interests upon the sea—and simply by the payment of accruing tolls; while we, with but a few lone merchantmen flying our flag on either ocean, to take advantage of the waterway, must foot the bills, repair all damages, bear all losses, and maintain the canal for the benefit of the commerce of the world.

On the other side of the canal the nearest possible enemy is 8,000 miles away; and so busy, and so successful in absorbing the fading remnant of our commerce in the Pacific that it considers any other kind of war with the United States unthinkable. Some few Americans have been Hobsonized into believing that Japan is ready to rise in wrath and obliterate America. But even Mr. Hobson would be slow to admit that she would run the international risk of obliterating the canal—unless we have fortifications there and use it as a war asset. Besides, Japan's budget, for the next six years, includes $6,500,000 a year for her navy; while we propose, during the same time, to expend at the least $130,000,000 a year upon our navy—without taking into account any new war harbors or appurtenances thereto. But if we are still afraid of Japan, one-tenth of the first cost of protecting the canal, if expended upon Pearl Harbor, Honolulu, and on our Samoan harbor, would create two stalwart naval stations on the Pacific,

which would forever prevent Japan from the possibility of bringing a battleship within a thousand miles of either Panama, or California.

Where, then, is the enemy, in fear of which we expend these hundreds of millions of dollars in fortifying the Panama Canal? If searching the twentieth century thru does not disclose the remotest possibility more formidable than a dream, can we not calm our fears with the assurance that a few of the big battleships from our otherwise utterly useless navy, patrolling the waters at either entrance, can probably protect the canal from any possible vagrant of the sea?

This is the exact situation; the folly, the danger and the crime in our expending millions upon millions of dollars in fortifying the canal. The first appropriation asked for was small. The main object in securing it was to bind Congress to an indorsement of the policy, for the benefit of future appropriations. Now is the last opportunity for public sentiment to demand a halt. Those in Congress most earnestly opposed to the policy are rousing for one more struggle to veto it; but they need the aid of public sentiment—and they ought to have it.

The social and economic organization of the world has advanced beyond the political organization, and far beyond the military organization. Industrially and commercially we are living in the twentieth century—not back in the eighteenth or earlier. Commerce, industry and finance have created empires more comprehensive than any federation of nations; world spheres, knowing no international boundary; binding nations together with chains of gold which render belligerency suicidal. It is only the old hysteria of militarism which instigates us still to run mad over the feudal policies of forts, just as we used to run after the soldiers parading on election days. But with such an age as ours to live up to, with such a record for international arbitration and world-peace as ours has been, can we not shake off the charm of the smell of gunpowder and the clank of spurs, and repudiate this proposition now, before it is too late? Realizing the inordinate extravagance, the dangerous folly of it, and the preposterous absurdity, can we not rouse ourselves and oust from our national policy, forever, the barbaric theory that promises are piecrust and that might makes right?

WASHINGTON, D. C.

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